Swami Ranganathananda

Spiritual Life of the Householder

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Swami Ranganathananda

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Publisher's Note

Swami Ranganathanandaji, currently President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, gave two fascinating talks on different occasions on *'Gṛhastha Dharma'* (Duties of a Householder) and 'How to Be an Ideal Householder'. They were published as separate booklets. Revised and re-edited by revered Maharaj, those talks are now being published together as a new booklet under the title 'Spiritual Life of the Householder'. We trust, the householder's, earnestly trying to attune their lives to the eternal ideals, values, and lofty principles of the householder's life amidst the fast changing situations and circumstances in the societies today, will find in this short publication illuminating thoughts and inspiration to help them in their lives' journey.

We are grateful to Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi and Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, the original publishers of these talks, for granting us permission to bring out the two talks in a single booklet form.

Calcutta
31 July 1999

Publisher

Gṛhastha Dharma*

1. Introduction

Yesterday I wanted to speak in Hindi, but Professor Kedarnath Labh, Secretary of this Ramakrishna Adbhutananda Ashrama of Chhapra, had asked me to speak in English. So I spoke in English yesterday, but today I shall speak in Hindi.

There are several languages in our country. Each region has its own language. If I go to Kerala, I have to speak in Malayalam; to Tamil Nadu, in Tamil; to Karnataka, in Kannada; to Bengal in Bengali; and here in Bihar, I have to speak in Hindi. All these languages are our own languages, the languages of our country. The languages are different but the culture is the same. We in India express the same culture through our different languages.

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*Based on the tape recording of a lecture delivered in Hindi by Swami Ranganathanandaji, the then vice-president of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, at Chhapra, Bihar, on 12 April 1992, on the occasion of the dedication of the Ramakrishna Adbhutananda Ashrama on 11 April 1992. Translated by Mrs. Asha Reddy, Chennai, and edited by the speaker, this article was published in the June 1993 issue of The Vedanta Kesari, a monthly published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.

Yesterday, this Ashrama, started in memory of Latu Maharaj or Swami Adbhutananda, an illiterate rural disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was inaugurated. Just now, Sri Udit Roy, our MLA, in his lecture, narrated the story of how this Ashrama came into existence, and the difficulties faced to establish it. I am sure you must have felt happy listening to it. You may be interested to know that, unlike here in Bihar, the Math at Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, received substantial help from the State. Only a few ministers and administrative officers of the Government of Andhra Pradesh in Hyderabad knew something of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, about eighteen years ago. Yet, one day, the then Chief Minister of the State, Sri Vengal Rao, now Industries Minister at the Centre, himself came to meet me and collected an application from me for grant of land for the Ashrama and, within five months, sanctioned me five acres of land almost in the centre of the city. There was no difficulty at all. Normally, such things can take even upto ten years, but within five months the Government gave the land to the Ashrama. I had prepared a programme of Rs.33 lakh for the development of the Ashrama. I told the Chief Minister that the Government should give us at least two-thirds of the money. He said, 'Why two-thirds? We will give you the entire amount. It is a matter of pride to us that, in Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, an Ashrama is being established in the name of Vivekananda. We feel honoured.' He asked me, 'What more do you need?' I said, 'I shall come to the Secretariat tomorrow to meet the Finance Secretary and the Education Secretary.' He said, 'No, why should you come? I will send those people to the Ashrama to discuss the matter with you.' So they came to the Ashrama,

discussed with me, and sanctioned Rs.22 lakh from the government departments for development of the Ashrama. After two or three years, they gave Rs.5 lakh more, and the Tirupati Devasthanam gave Rs. 12 lakh. A new Ashrama was established after spending about Rs.60 lakh. We also received later three more acres of land in the neighbourhood. So the new Ashrama is now functioning in eight acres of land.

2. The Need to Propagate the Message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda

Wherever people have studied Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, the feeling has risen in their hearts that Ramakrishna and Vivekananda lived for the upliftment of the people of the world, for the upliftment also of all sections in our country—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, tribals, and non tribals. This is the awareness one gets on reading Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. When this awareness spreads in the entire country, there will be upliftment and progress of the country. But the upward movement has become a little static now. It is to correct this that we need to propagate the thoughts of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

3. Gṛhastha Dharma

I wish to speak today on the *dharma,* or status and duties, of a householder. People say that they are *gṛhasthas.* Most people are *gṛhasthas,* only a few are sannyāsins. But, in this state of Bihar, there used to be a large number of sannyāsins at one time. There were

also then many *gṛhasthas.* But the position of the *gṛhastha* had sunk very low. This state is called Bihar. The word 'Bihar' brings to our mind a *vihāra,* i.e. a Math or an Ashrama. So the state came to be called Bihar because of the large increase in the number of *vihāras* in which Buddhist sannyāsins lived. In the beginning, the *vihāras* were functioning well; later, many who became Buddhist sannyāsins were unfit for it and had become very lazy. The result was that nobody worked. They fell down from the ideal. There was a lot of misconception in those days about religion. People could not understand the eternal values of religion. So the householder's life became devalued and imitated the lazy sannyāsins. And the society in Bihar degenerated; this happened all over India, but its impact was most in Bihar, which is described today as a rich state with poor people.

In the modern age, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda have appeared on the scene to show the householders their true place in life and to enhance their prestige. Sri Ramakrishna himself was a *gṛhastha,* householder. Sri Sarada Devi was a householder. Both of them enhanced the glory of the institution of the *gṛhastha.* Till recently, our *gṛhasthas* were underestimating themselves quite a lot. I travel all over India and everywhere I find people saying, 'We are after all *gṛhasthas*! What can we achieve?' *Gṛhasthas* belittle themselves in this way. This is wrong; this is against the scriptures and is harmful to the progress of the country. It is for this reason that incarnations arrive to give *gṛhasthas* self-confidence, prestige, and strength. Even the incarnations are born in *gṛhastha* families. The entire world, the entire society, depends upon the *gṛhastha.* It is for this reason that I

want to speak a little today on this subject.

4. Sri Ramakrishna: the Re-establisher of the Gṛhastha Dharma

There are several chapters in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* where we see Sri Ramakrishna advising the devotees in clear words about the duties of a *gṛhastha. A gṛhastha* once asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'We are *gṛhasthas,* how can we attain God?' Sri Ramakrishna's answer was; 'Why can you not attain God? God is within everyone, He is the *antaryāmī,* inner ruler. You must remember Him always and live and do your work, and everything will be all right.' This is the way Sri Ramakrishna encourages *gṛhasthas* in several chapters of the *Gospel.*

We must realize that a *gṛhastha is* one who lives in a *gṛha* or home. But he has the freedom to be inside or outside the home. Without this freedom, a home would become a prison. A home is not a prison, it's a household. In our country, the householder's life had become like a prisoner's life. Our minds never went beyond the life in the household. We remained constricted within a small circle. We lost the feeling of vastness. Our minds became narrow. We were concerned with only 'I and mine' *(āmi* and *āmār,* as they say in Bengali). Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Get rid of *āmi,* and *āmār,* "I and mine."' We knew only 'I and mine' and nothing else. We did not know what the state of the country was, how thousands of people were experiencing hunger and starvation and how they were being exploited. We knew nothing about these things. It was almost as if we had converted our home into a prison. As a result

of this, for almost 800 years we had fallen low. There were foreign invasions and we lost our independence. Then Sri Ramakrishna appeared to show the true path to the *gṛhasthas,* to give them a sense of dignity.

5. Gṛhastha Ashrama: The Greatest Ashrama

There is a verse in the *Manu Smṛti.* I want to quote for you this verse so that you realize the greatness of a *gṛhastha.* It says:

Yasmāt trayo'pyāśramiṇo
jñānenānnena cānvāham;
Gṛhasthenaiva dhāryante
tasmāt jyeṣṭhāśramī gṛhi—

'The *gṛhastha ashrama is* the greatest among the ashramas, because it is only the *gṛhastha* who provides food and education to the people of the other three *ashramas.*'

A *brahmacārī* does not earn any money, a *vānaprasthī* too does not earn anything, and so also a *sannyāsin.* It is only the *gṛhastha* who earns money, engages in productive work, and supports the entire society. A *gṛhastha* does so much work and yet underestimates himself! He should be proud of his contribution to society. Society runs on the strength of a *gṛhastha.* So the *gṛhastha ashrama* is the greatest of the four *ashramas.*

What Manu has said above appears before us in a new language today. I am referring to the modern concept of citizenship. A citizen is not concerned only with his or her own home. He or she thinks of the progress of the entire country. Only when anyone works with the idea that the country as a whole should progress, does he or she become a citizen, a true *gṛhastha.* So today, a *gṛhastha* stands for a citizen. By

becoming a citizen, his or her mind will be broadened. He or she will then think in terms of the progress of all people and act accordingly. A *gṛhastha,* if he or she is not also a citizen, will remain a *gṛhastha* only in name; one imprisoned, as it were, in a home. The Parliament considers us as adults when we are twenty-one and gives us the right to vote. Nowadays, the age limit has been lowered to eighteen. But this is only an external criterion. Internally, we should have within us the sense of national and social responsibility. We should always be concerned about the progress of our society. There must be a feeling that whatever work we do must have bearing on the welfare of society also. This is the true nature of a citizen.

There are two values in citizenship. One is freedom. A man or woman is free; a citizen is free. The second is responsibility. There must be the awareness of social responsibility along with freedom. A citizen should have a sense of national responsibility. It is only when these two values—freedom and responsibility—come together that an individual becomes a citizen, a true *gṛhastha.* Today, there is a need in our country to educate millions of our adults to become such citizens. The advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was for this purpose. They educate people in the values of strength and self-reliance and a concern for others. They tell them to have faith and confidence in their inner, inherent, spiritual nature.

Swami Vivekananda lays emphasis again and again on *ātma-śraddhā,* faith in oneself. He said that we had faith in thirty-three crore of our gods and goddesses, but that did not help us, because we did not have faith in ourselves. So he repeatedly exhorts us to have faith in ourselves first, and then to have faith in God and

other human beings. To be a true *gṛhastha,* it is necessary to have self-confidence and self-reliance. The people of our country had lost these. They knew only how to devalue themselves by saying, 'I am only a *gṛhastha,* I am only a *saṁsārī,* mine is only a weak human existence.' Casting aside this feeling, making the mind broader, and taking the responsibility for the progress of our country—this is what we have not done. And so, during the last 800 years of our history, *others created history and we became only victims of that history.*

We have now to shed the feeling of regret associated with being *gṛhasthas.* We shall create history in the modern period. We have to give up the depressing feeling that we are *saṁsārīs* or worldly people. Live in *saṁsāra,* or the world, but don't allow *saṁsāra,* worldliness, consisting of selfishness and exploitation and pettiness, to live in you. This is what Sri Ramakrishna teaches; and he adds, a boat will be on water, but water should not be in the boat; that will make the boat stagnant and unfit for the purpose for which it is meant. We should have the feeling that we are the citizens of independent India. India is now free, there are no kings or princes left. Every citizen is sovereign and free. This is democracy. In a democracy, citizenship is the highest status. We now have a constitution of our own and also our own satellites in space. Our responsibility thus has increased considerably. We had forgotten that there was a national responsibility on us. We had become petty, imprisoned *gṛhasthas.* We were concerned only with ourselves and our own pleasure and profit, and salvation in some heaven. We had forgotten everything else. This must now stop. A study of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature shows us that worshipping in a temple and serving the weaker

sections of our society are not two different things.

Really speaking, we do not even worship in a temple. We only pay the priest to perform the worship on our behalf. With this, our job is done. This has become our *dharma* and this has been going on for the past 800 years. This was the cause of our downfall. Day by day there was a decline. We are now trying to raise ourselves up. We are becoming modern. When Swami Vivekananda toured India as a wandering monk and saw the miserable condition of the country, the first question that arose in his mind was this: the India described in our books, scriptures, and *purāṇās*, is so wonderful; why then is modern India in such a pitiable state? The country is now celebrating the centenary of Vivekananda's *Bhārat Parikramā*. A group of the Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari, is now travelling from Calcutta to Kanyakumari along the same route Swamiji had taken a hundred years ago. They will reach Kanyakumari in December 1992.

Swami Vivekananda undertook his journey across India to learn about the actual condition of our people. No religious or political leader had undertaken such a journey before. Swamiji was the first one to do so. He saw how poor and miserable the people were and how the rich and the high had suppressed them. This was the state of our country. It was a veritable hell. Swamiji asked himself why there were so many poor people in our country. There must be some fault either in our philosophy or in our pattern of life. That is why such a thing had happened; and we shall work hard to raise all our people. This question and this answer we got for the first time, in our country, through Swami Vivekananda. He was a sannyāsin, he had renounced everything, but still the fire of patriotism and human

concern was burning brightly in his heart. His eyes were filled with tears after seeing the condition of our masses, and when he sat for meditation at Kanyakumari, there was only one question in his mind, how he could solve the problems of his country. He felt that we had forgotten the dignity of human life. People of the higher classes had forgotten it too. How can the country be uplifted?—this was the theme of Swamiji's meditation. The answer he got was this: The people of India will be uplifted only when they are filled with courage and *ātma-śraddhā,* faith in themselves, and love for the country and its people.

We have to learn the art of team-work. All the time we were busy quarrelling. Whether it be in a gram pañcāyat, or a municipality, there is nothing but quarrelling, and no joint tackling of human problems. After forty-five years of independence, the situation is the same. Even a few of us cannot work together. No great work can be done by one individual alone. We have to learn to work together and achieve results. To work together, strength of character is necessary. This is precisely what we are lacking today. Every one is full of egoism: You have no place in my thoughts nor have I a place in yours. This shows the absence of character and why we could not learn to work together to serve the people. But we have to learn it now. Only then can we solve our immense economic and social problems. Only by working together can we spread education among all our people and improve the lot of our women. This is what Swamiji meditated upon at Kanyakumari, and what he wrote in his letters from America and England to people in India dealt with these problems with insight and power.

The youth of our country will be inspired by reading

these letters of Swami Vivekananda. In his letters he scolds us saying, what kind of people are you? There are so many illiterate and hungry people in our country. They have been oppressed and exploited for centuries; and you, the educated upper classes, are callous and indifferent! 'So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man (or woman) a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them.' A fire of patriotism and love of service is lit in our hearts on reading Swamiji's letters containing many such fiery utterances. These letters contain *agnimantrās.*

Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji incarnated themselves on this earth to establish a new and healthy *gṛhastha* dharma, a new *gṛhastha* order. They have demonstrated through their lives how to work in a spirit of love and service. This is precisely the attitude of citizenship. It is only in name that most of our *gṛhasthas* are citizens; real citizenship is different; it contains the spirit of social responsibility and service. Then it becomes enlightened citizenship; that is what answers to the definition of a gṛhastha as citizen, given by Manu and quoted earlier. A young man or a young woman gets married and becomes a *gṛhastha.* But such men and women are *gṛhasthas* only in the ordinary sense; they are citizens only in name; not enlightened citizens. To be real gṛhasthas, they must be imbued with the sense of responsibility to feel concerned about the problems of their nation and the desire to work to solve them. Hear what Vivekananda writes in one of his letters: Why should even a dog die of hunger in my country? To find food for it is my religion! We have to realize that there is something wrong with our philosophy of life and we must change it. There are

hungry people and hungry animals in millions in our nation, because we were selfish and selfcentred, along with a lot of noisy, religious piety. Vivekananda exhorts us to assimilate and live—not just recite piously—the *Bhagavad Gitā,* the best book on the philosophy of practical Vedanta.

All our *gṛhasthas,* men and women, have to discharge one important citizenship responsibility to their nation in the modern age, and that is, the achievement of zero population growth by the end of this century. The number of children born must be only as much as can replace the number of men, women, and children that die in a year. No family should have more than two children. The enormous population growth since our independence in 1947 has prevented our nation from becoming a developed country; quantity is overwhelming quality. This must now be reversed; removal of poverty, spread of universal education, achievement of a minimum standard of human living by all our people of all social levels, depend upon this. Let all our *gṛhasthas* add strength to our government's efforts in this field by adopting the small family norm themselves, and influencing others also to do so, by taking all help from medical and spiritual resources. This is *gṛhastha* as a citizen of a democratic polity, which is Indian in the modern period.

I have been visiting countries abroad for several years. Never have I seen such poverty and suffering in Europe, America, Australia, and other countries. Even cattle, dogs, and cats there are well-fed and healthy. People are, of course, well-fed and strong. There is no poverty and want anywhere. How did this happen? Not by magic, but only through hard work, team-work, and a sense of personal dignity and social

responsibility. We should also do the same here. We have to strengthen our character; and *character is centred in a socially oriented will.* We lack the power that comes through working together for our own good and for the good of the nation; we talk much but work less. As individuals, we are all right; but in group activity, we fail. Even a few people are not able to work together. Working together is very essential, because we can achieve economic and social progress only through team-work. That is why, in Sanskrit, it is called *abhivṛddhi.* Abhi means 'in the company of.' *Abhyudaya* also means the same thing: *udaya* means development, and *abhi* means 'along with others.' These capacities will come to us when we become *gṛhasthas* with the citizenship awareness. It is only by such *gṛhasthas* that every village will become a model village, with cleanliness, electric lighting of streets and lanes, education, and water supply. Much can be achieved by way of social transformation and all-round development by our people learning to work together.

We have to achieve many attitudinal changes before we learn to work together. We are much addicted to litigation. I have never seen so much of litigation in any other country. We cannot decide anything by resort to mutual discussion. We have faith in a god in the temple, but no faith in our fellow human beings. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda said in his famous Madras lecture in 1897 on 'The Future of India' *(Complete Works,* Vol. III, pp. 300–01):

'For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote, this our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds.

This is the only god that is awake, our own race—'everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers every thing.' All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the god that we see all round us, the *Virat*?'

Swami Vivekananda always emphasized that you should first have faith in yourself, and then in God and in other human beings. Such faith alone can enable one to accomplish great things. There is a need for millions of such *gṛhasthas* today.

According to our Constitution, a youth of 18 years can vote. He becomes a full citizen. But he becomes a citizen only in name. In him there is no development of character or social responsibility. He wants only freedom, freedom, and freedom for himself, but no social responsibility. Freedom without responsibility is dangerous. I had once gone to a Sonepat college in Haryana to give a talk. The principal there told me that many boys and girls came from Delhi to study there, but none of them bought a railway ticket; they travelled ticketless. During my talk I reprimanded the students on their behaviour. I told them; 'What is this you young people are doing? Are you not citizens of your democratic India? You travel in the trains of your country without paying the fare. Is this your culture? Have you no responsibility to your nation? Are you not ashamed of yourselves for behaving like irresponsible, self-centred children?' When I thus scolded them, the principal told me later: 'Nobody has talked to them like this. If we had done it, we would have been beaten up. It is a good thing that you said it, we shall also do the same in future.'

The prosperity of our nation depends on people

with self-respect and a sense of personal honour, not on clever people or beggars. Many of our people don't have any sense of patriotism. I keep talking about this wherever I go. When Sri Kedar Pandey was the Chief Minister of Bihar, I had addressed in 1973, at his request, the staff of the Patna Secretariat and told them, 'Many of you are at present clerks. As clerks, you appear to be ordinary persons. But you must realize that you are primarily citizens of democratic India and only functioning as clerks. A free citizen functioning as a clerk. If you capture this truth and this attitude, you will grow in status.' Take a school teacher in a primary school in a village. The teacher may think that he or she is just an ordinary employee. He or she does not know the real focus of his or her dignity and worth. That dignity he or she will experience when he or she says, 'I am a proud citizen of India doing the national function of teaching.' By working with this consciousness, one raises one's dignity and stature. Every citizen in the country should think, 'I am a citizen of India and I must shoulder the burdens of my country by working honestly in the field of my work. I shall try to do my duties to the best of my ability.' I said: Do a clerk's work, but not with a clerk's mind, do it with a citizen's mind. When everyone cultivates this firm faith, there will be a revolutionary change in the country. The present feeling that we are ordinary *gṛhasthas* will vanish and will be replaced by the feeling that we are the citizens of the great democratic state of India and are proud of it.

6. The Two Faces of India

What is this India of ours? It has been alive for thousands of years. Ancient and rich has been the heritage of our great country. Even now, there is great respect for India in the rest of the world. There are two faces of India. One is the eternal India, the *amar Bhārat*. That eternal India is looked upon by the world with faith and respect. The other one is the sick India in which you and I live and function. The India of today is full of evils like corruption, violence, exploitation, litigation, jealousy, and hatred, and mounting problems of poverty, illiteracy, and fissiparous tendencies. Even our Parliament and State Assemblies reflect only that sick India. But the entire world looks with great love and respect and hope upon that eternal India, the India which is the storehouse of high philosophy and spirituality, such as the Vedanta.

I travel abroad every year, and several other authentic spiritual teachers also travel abroad. Neither they nor I have to spend even a single paisa of our country. Foreigners pay for all expenses. They invite me by paying for my travelling and maintenance expenses, so that they can listen to my speaking about Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Some countries like Yugoslavia, Germany, U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, and France have even treated me as their state guest. There is a lot of respect for *amar Bharāt,* the eternal India, in these and many other countries, because they know they can learn a lot from it.

But modern India is the sick India, full of various maladies and privations and destitution. Some fifteen years ago, we used to go around the world as beggars asking for aid. Once I stayed as a guest at the Indian

High Commissioner's residence in the capital of New Zealand. His daughter was studying in a school in the capital. She told me that the principal of the school pointed out to a girl one day and asked her why she was wearing a torn shirt. She should send it to the Indian Prime Minister as aid. It would be useful to the poor of India. The High Commissioner's daughter told me that, on hearing this, she felt ashamed that we had sunk so low. We were then fit for only begging all over the world. That condition is changing now.

When I returned to Delhi, I gave, on invitation from our Doordarshan, an interview in its spotlight programme. I mentioned this incident in the course of my talk. I said that the position of India in the world is that of a beggar. All our people must be ashamed of this situation. Therefore, we should try to steer the sick India toward the eternal India as quickly as possible. It is disturbing to see that decline in the integrity and character of our countrymen. There is no spirit of cooperation anywhere but only quarrels and conflicts. No school functions properly. Many teachers do not even go to their school. I went to one of our states where a gentleman told me, 'Swamiji, the monthly salary of a teacher here is Rs.800. He sends somebody else in his place by paying him Rs.200. He does not go himself. He pockets the remaining Rs.600.' I have never seen anything like this anywhere else in the world. The evils that now bedevil our country do not appear to exist anywhere else in the world to the same extent.

Before our independence, there were many good, broad-minded people in India. Nowadays, we have too many petty minded people. I occasionally say we are small people of a big and great country. This must

change. Several times in our earlier history, our country was great. Many foreigners came here and took with them noble and positive ideas. Then came stagnation which is now being lifted. Swamiji said, expansion is life and contraction is death. We were contracting our minds and moving towards death. Swamiji came to reverse this. He exhorts our people to give up our narrow ideas and try to become broad-minded in every sphere; receive ideas from other nations, assimilate them, and make the nation progressive and modern.

7. Conclusion

There are only rituals left in all our religions, nothing else. Even these are got done by a priest. People pay him a rupee or two. This is how we practice 'religion' today! Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have come to teach us that religion means spiritual growth and the development of character, and rituals and other practices are of no use if they cannot help us to attain these.

Spiritual growth or manifestation of the Divine within is the key term in religion. A new-born baby weighs about seven or eight pounds. Gradually, through food and drink, it grows to twenty pounds, then to a hundred and fifty pounds. This is physical growth. There is similarly a mental growth also. At the time of joining a school, the mind of a child is small and limited; by study, it then grows in knowledge gradually. Similar is the case with religion. If you go to a temple everyday, but remain as you are, petty and selfish, in morals and manners, that is not religion at all. You have to become a centre of values; love, com-

passion, spirit of service—that is the sign of spiritual growth. Swamiji therefore defined religion as the manifestation of the Divinity already within man. Romain Rolland refers to the powerful impact of the utterances of Swami Vivekananda on the human mind in a remarkable statement *(Life of Vivekananda,* p. 162*):*

'His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports, must have been produced when, in burning words, they issued from the lips of the hero!'

There are over 850 million people in our country; we are thus great in quantity but small in quality; we are weak in performance. Compared to countries like Germany and Holland, we are poor workers. We spend much of our energy in talking. We are a talkative nation, more fond of chattering than working. Swamiji says, talk less, feel more, act more. No people anywhere in the world talk so much as we Indians do. There should be no talk while working in factories and offices. This saves energy and gets public work done expeditiously. We must learn to meditate silently in our temples and work silently in our factories and offices. The energy saved this way will give us the capacity to feel more and serve more efficiently.

We find all these thoughts in the literature of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda literature is available in eight volumes (presently nine volumes) of his *Complete Works.* We learn from Swamiji's lectures how to make our minds modern, how

to make our nation also modern. Swamiji was modern; there was a blend of the East and the West in him. There was a mingling of both the cultures in him. We need today to combine the energy of Western nations and the spiritual culture of India. The Vedanta of Swamiji is the philosophy that will make our nation great in the modern period. This is the first time that we have the opportunity to put our Vedanta into practice. The progress of India is possible only by following the path shown by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji.

Swami Vivekananda says that there should be only a few sannyāsins in a society, and the rest of the people should be strong, healthy *gṛhasthas* with the capacity for mutual cooperation and with a desire to serve the weaker sections. Only then will our country be a developed nation. I wish to appeal to you that all of you should become good gṛhasthas according to the ideals placed before the nation by Swamiji, *gṛhasthas* growing into citizens, *gṛhasthas* who care for their family and also discharge their citizenship responsibilities to the nation. You have my best wishes.

How to be an Ideal Householder*

Expecting only a small gathering, Swami Gokulananda had arranged for an informal talk by me in the basement of the temple; but about 600 people is not a small gathering. So the venue had to be shifted to this Vivekananda Lecture Hall. Still, I shall give only an informal talk today on the announced subject 'Householders and their Spiritual Life' and not a public lecture.

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* there are several chapters entitled 'Advice to Householders' etc. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to householders is a great subject. When we say 'householder', it means that it concerns 99.9 percent of the population. That means the people at large. How shall they live their life is a very great question. There is one sentence in Swami Vivekananda's lecture where he says, 'I don't call anyone a Hindu who is not spiritual.' What a beautiful idea it is! They must be spiritual, not merely religious;

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* A talk by Swami Ranganathanandaji delivered on 17 May 1998, at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.

to be religious is very easy: put on a sandal mark or ashes on your forehead, you become a Hindu; put on a cross, you become a Christian; and put on a moon crescent on the cap, you become a Muslim. Thus it is easy to become religious. But what is wanted is that we should be spiritual, and not merely being religious. And this concept of spirituality comes to us from the Upanishads, because the Upanishads describe that the human nature is essentially spiritual. Behind the body-mind-complex is the Atman, of the nature of *cit* and *sat*—'consciousness' and 'reality'. Infinity is our true nature. This is the discovery; we call it a scientific truth about the human being. By examining the human beings in depth, our sages of the Upanishads discovered this great truth. In the *Kathopanisad,* we read this beautiful sentence. During the course of his teaching, Yama said to Naciketa (3.12):

> *Eṣa sarveṣu bhuteṣu gūdho ātmā na prakāśyate;*
> *Dṛśyate tvagrayā buddhyā sukśmayā sukśma darśibhiḥ*—

'This Atman is present in all beings but hidden and so not manifest; but it can be realized by a sharply one-pointed subtle mind, by those who are trained in dealing with subtle and still more subtle realities.'

This profound truth of the Atman, the divine pure consciousness, ever pure, ever free and immortal, is present in every human being. Only it is hidden, not manifested. Does it always remain hidden? No. It has been realized by the great sages; and it can be realized by one and all. Human beings have the organic capacity for it. How? When the mind is trained to discover subtle

truths, the subtlest minds can discover this subtlest of truths, the Atman.

Today's nuclear science proves this to you. A subtle mind can see the subtle nature of matter. That matter consists of energy is the discovery of the subtle mind of the modern scientists. It was not there at Newton's time. He had a subtle mind up to that; more subtle it became in the 20th century. Similarly, in dealing with the truth of the human being, there are two dimensions: ordinary mind and subtle mind. We need a very subtle mind. How do you get it? *Sukśma darśibhiḥ*—those who practice dealing with subtle truths and still more subtle truths, will develop the subtlest mind which can penetrate into the subtlest truth of the Atman hidden within. This is a statement from the third chapter of *Kathopanisad* where you have another great utterance, like a marching order (1. 3. 14)

Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata—

'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.' This is Swami Vivekananda's free translation of the text which literally means 'Arise, awake, and enlighten yourself by approaching the great ones.' What a wonderful message!

Becoming a householder, we are passing through one phase of our life. According to the Vedic conception of human life, one hundred years is the limit of human life. Śankarācārya writes: *Tāvad hi puruṣasya paramāyuḥ nibodhitam*—'That much is the length of human life.' So, we divide this human life into four portions: First as a student, *brahmacārin,* to study and develop knowledge. There is so much knowledge to

acquire. A human child needs about 20-25 years to acquire knowledge and get educated. The animal child does not take so much time. When a calf is born, within one hour, it learns how to jump about. It goes out here and there and its education is over. But a human child, for about 25 years, is in the process of being educated. This is the *brahmacarya* period. This kind of life-analysis you will find in no other literature. Then, after you become about 25, the next is the life which is called *gṛhastha,* householder. It means marriage, living as wife and husband; two people join together, creating a family with one or two children. Nature wants it, nature dictates to the human being, saying, 'Yes, you produce one or two children.' Today's biology tells you that nature is not interested in any species which does not reproduce itself. If there is no reproduction, nature cannot continue, evolution cannot proceed. Therefore, in the human being, we have this function in the life where you become an instrument of nature to continue the evolution of the human race with one or two children.

Formerly there used to be hundred children to a human being when there was no population problem in the world. Today, however, it is strictly one or two. Nothing more we need. This is one phase. But, in the course of doing nature's work, you are also to develop your spiritual life. Even as a *brahmacārin,* the human being starts realizing his or her divine nature that is within. If you manifest the divine, you learn how to love people, how to serve people, how to live together in peace in society. What can I do for you? How can I help you?—this capacity comes to you. It is a wonderful idea—'I am not alone in this world, so many other

people are also there. How can I negotiate with all these people in a friendly way?' What a beautiful conception! We are not in a crowd, but in an integrated society. That integration comes from that capacity to love people, to serve people. Then you are able to lead a happy life by mutual help, mutual development. The *Gitā* says (3.11):

Parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ paramavāpsyath—

'By loving and serving each other, all can attain the highest.' To achieve great welfare, we need the capacity to help each other, interact with each other in a positive way. This is the ideal householder's life. In this way, the householder will have mental peace and fine children who will continue and further enrich the human culture and civilization.

Here, modern biology tells you one profound truth—human uniqueness—the distinction between pre-human species of animals and the human species. One distinction is, they have only one inheritance, the genetic. We also have genetic inheritance—father and mother gave us our body. In this way, genetic inheritance goes on. But a human being has another inheritance also; they call it cultural inheritance. Today biology tells you that culture is cumulative knowledge, cumulative experience. In the Vedic times they had some experience. That did not get lost with their death; they put it in writing, and it became the Vedas. It becomes the property of the next generations. Thus literature, art, science, religion, and philosophy get richer and richer and become the inheritance of the human generations. That is called 'cumulative culture'. It goes on expanding and

expanding. No animal has cultural inheritance. The human child inherits not only the hereditary system from the parents and grandparents, but also the culture coming from olden times. So, a double inheritance we have as a human being and so we have to develop that culture, expand that culture, giving to the next generation something richer, something better, from our own experience. That is the householder's responsibility.

This is what we in India had forgotten since some centuries till now; we became a stagnant culture—no change, no development, nothing but absolute stagnation for the last several centuries. In the earlier period, great developments were there in various fields; but somehow, since a thousand years, we were down and down. It was a cultural stagnation. We did not communicate with people of other countries. We kept people away by discovering the word and concept of *mleccha*. All other nations are *mleccha*. Don't touch a *mleccha;* don't cross the borders of our own country. Swami Vivekananda noted it and he has said in one sentence:

'The fate of India was sealed when she discovered the word *mleccha* and stopped communication with the world outside.'

We suffered much from it. In not communicating with others, we became stagnant like the Bourbon dynasty in France about which historians say that the Bourbons learned nothing new and forgot nothing old, and so the violent French Revolution came. And the same statement comes to you from the great Arab traveller, Al Beruni, who came to India in the 10th century A.D. along with Muhammad Ghazni. Al Beruni knew Sanskrit and much of Indian philosophy. Ghazni came

to loot the material wealth of India and Al Beruni came to take India's philosophical wealth. His observations on India are contained in his book *Al Beruni's India.* He says: 'What happened to the people of India? Their ancestors were not narrow-minded like *this;* they don't mix with anybody, they don't give their knowledge to anybody, they won't take knowledge from anybody. Their ancestors were not like this.'

That is the language we find there. What Swami Vivekananda said is what Al Beruni had said earlier, about a thousand years ago. That India is no more the same now. We have become open. Now we can exchange ideas with people, receive and give ideas, and thus develop a universal concept of humanity as one. Today's biology describes humanity as a single species. Even one insect has hundreds of species. But the human being is a single species, interbreeding and inter-thinking. What a beautiful conception! We are all one physically speaking; but the Vedanta adds that spiritually also we are one. The Upanishads discovered that one infinite Atman is in you, in me, in all. Spiritually we are all one. We must know this truth. Physically also we are one. So, we framed our life in India from that point of view. Later on, narrow-mindedness came, we did not go out and learn new developments; and the result was that we lost our political freedom to foreign invaders. They used guns, we used only arrows and bows. And so we lost every time, because we did not know what developments had taken place elsewhere. Today we have learnt that lesson. Our mind is open to receive and to give. Swami Vivekananda particularly emphasized this point again and again.

But today's householder is a unique type of person.

He can give to others, and he can take from others; this is the way to develop a human consciousness, a human culture. The world is developing in that direction, and India will contribute to that. Today's householder, therefore, cannot be narrow, cannot be exclusive. That is why we are breaking down all caste exclusiveness and all narrow social attitudes. During the British period, caste awareness was very strong. When the Governor or the Viceroy would meet a prince of an Indian royal family, he had to ıeceive them, talk with them, and even shake hands with them. After their guests have gone away, the prince used to take a bath also secretly to remove the pollution! That was the narrowness we had at that time. Today that is all gone. Most of our people are open now. This time is the best to build up our life in the correct manner as given in our Vedanta—the profound, comprehensive, and humanistic philosophy and spirituality of the Upanishads and the Gitā. Much of it is found in the Puranas also. But these two are the main source. They contain universal, spiritual, philosophical teachings, not for Hindus only, but for every human being. They always kept in view humanity as a whole.

Śṛṇvantu viśve amṛtasya putrāḥ—

'Listen to me, O children of immortality, of the whole world.'

See the language of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniśad,* addressing all human beings, the verse which Swami Vivekananda quoted and expounded in the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893, which had a telling effect on the vast audience. 'Listen to me, O children

of immortality everywhere! You are not children of sin. It is a sin to call a man so, it is a standing libel on human nature.' This is the language Swamiji used in the Chicago Parliament. So, the human being is a child of immortality. That is what the Upanishads had proclaimed a few thousand years ago; whether it is in India or outside is just the same—Hindu, Muslim, Christian, atheist, agnostic—all are children of immortality. We are essentially the immortal Atman. That is our true nature. *Tat tvam asi*—'*You are That*', you are all that divine immortal Atman. That is the language of the *Chāndogya Upaniśad,* 6th chapter. This kind of profound message of the Upanishads and the *Gitā* are there to guide us. No other guidance can be taken as primary, but this is primary. This will produce a Vedantic India. If that is taken up earnestly, a new type of householder's life will develop in India—full of vigour, full of strength, full of humanistic impulse.

A *gṛhastha,* wife or husband, is one who lives in a *gṛha* or home. Is he or she to be confined to the home and to the care of his genetic family members? If so, the home becomes a prison. No, he or she is to be concerned with the welfare of the society of which he or she is a member. In India we neglected this idea in recent centuries. But a new situation has arisen in the modern period. India is a vast, free democratic country today; it has no princes, kings, or emperors. Its sovereignty rests in the millions of its democratic citizens. That freedom of citizenship is the status of all our *gṛhasthis* today—of both men and women. On their shoulders rests our democratic state. That freedom must be enriched by a sense of national responsibility by every householder today. Such free and responsible

citizens alone can energize our various political institutions, from *grām pañcāyats* through state legislatures up to the Union Parliament, as well as our cooperative and other societies.

Among his or her national responsibilities today is controlling of our population growth which has been uncontrolled since our Independence in 1947. All our poverty alleviation and mass education programmes become nullified by this one factor. We have to achieve zero population growth as soon as possible. We have remained an underdeveloped country even after years of freedom because of this galloping population. All our people must discharge their citizenship responsibility to their nation by actively helping the Union and State Governments' efforts in this direction by adopting the small family norm themselves and influencing others also to do so by taking all help from spiritual and medical resources.

Till now, our householders had certain weaknesses. Firstly, they harbour a lot of superstitions. Any superstition can get into the mind of a householder. A sadhu going about in a village can tell this and that, and they all believe what they hear. In this way, you will find the experience of fear, the product of superstition. That is the constant feeling of householders in India and that fear can receive stimulus from small untoward happenings also. In this way, you will find all over India many superstitions cultivated by the minds of householders whose ideas of religion are more magical and not spiritual. Somebody came to the house, and the next day the child fell ill. 'Oh, that man's visit has brought this illness of my child'—the parents come to this unscientific conclusion. There is

nothing of science or even common sense in it; it is all antiscience, superstition. It is based only on the scientific method of agreement. Two things happening together is interpreted as one being the cause of the other. To get a scientific conclusion, you must apply a second method also—the method of difference. Withdraw one factor, and if the result is the same, then that cause and effect conclusion of the method of agreement becomes falsified. In a book on logic and scientific method, an example is given about the insufficiency and fault of depending on the method of agreement alone. A man used to come out of the post office every day at 7 o'clock. The sun used to rise at that time. And some people concluded that the man's coming out is the cause of the sun rising! It is an absolutely foolish conclusion; it must be corrected by asking the man not to come out at 7 o'clock, and watching whether the sun rises or not. This is the method of difference. Then there is the method of concomitant variation and the method of residues. All these scientific methods are there to establish correct cause and effect relations. But in family life, people rely only on the weakest method of agreement. Education will correct this to some extent. 'Knowledge destroys fear' is a famous statement. Hindu and Indian society will be different when some kind of scientific thinking comes to our people. Then only can our people understand Vedanta and benefit from it. Vedanta is very, very scientific. What is the meaning of 'scientific'? It means that which deals with truth as it is. That is called scientific. You only discover that truth, you don't create it, you don't alter it, you don't abolish it, you just recognize it. Ādi Śankarācārya calls it *vastu tantra jñāna; kartum, akartum, anyathā kartum na*

śakyate, vastu tantratvāt eva, in his *Brahma Sūtra* commentary, and adds: *brahmajñānam vastu tantra jñānam*—'knowledge of Brahman is based on the existing truth of Brahman.' 'Fire is hot' is a truth, not an opinion. Most people have only opinions, they don't know the truth of things. In his *Brahma Sutra Bhāṣya,* Śankarācārya writes in the Introduction, as said already: *brahmajñānam vastu tantra jñānam.* Vedanta presents this to you as the truth, not as an opinion. The word used is *vastu tantra jñānam.* See the technical term! *Vastu* means existing reality; *tantra* means based on; and, *jñānam* means knowledge—'knowledge based on existing reality'. What a beautiful conception! So he says: *Brahmajñānam vastu tantra jñānam.*

Kartum, akartum, anyathā kartum na śakyate, vastu tantratvādeva—'Knowledge of Brahman is based on the existing Reality of Brahman. You cannot create it, cannot abolish it, or alter it, because it is an existing Reality.'

That is called scientific truth. The other is called *puruṣa tantra jñānam.* 'I shall fast on a Monday.' It is up to you. There is no objective or universal truth about it. You may as well say, 'I shall fast on a Saturday.' It is up to you. It is called *puruṣa tantra jñānam*—'knowledge based on the person concerned'. In this way, Śankarācārya, towards the end of that section, says:

Ātmaikatva vidyā pratipattaye sarve vedānta ārabhyante—'All the Upanishads are intended to convey to you the knowledge of the unity of the Atman.'

There is only one Atman, of the nature of pure Consciousness. Consciousness has no plural, it is always a singular. It is a wonderful statement in the Upanishads.

And today what the nuclear scientist, Schroedinger, says adds strength to it: 'Consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown.' It is just like space which has no plural. Space is one—inside the room or outside the room—all one space only. You seem to divide it, but you cannot divide it. So also the Atman, as pure Consciousness, is only one, in you, in me, in all. That is the great Vedāntic teaching which the Upanishads convey to all people all over the world. What a profound philosophy! What possibilities will be realized when this philosophy is applied to life, individual and collective! Physical unification is taking place through technology. Today you can travel quickly. The East India Company people used to take one and a half years to reach India from England. But today, within 5 or 10 hours one can reach here. Similarly, communication of ideas also—telegrams, and now fax. In one or two minutes, your information reaches a far-off destination. But, the minds and hearts of people must also be close to each other. That is not yet possible. It can be possible only through this unifying message of Vedānta, the product of a science of man in depth. Take it up, verify it for yourself. This is what the Śvetaśvatara Upanishad said:

Vedāhametam puruṣam mahāntam—

'I have realized this Infinite Man behind the finite man,' and

Tameva viditvā atimṛtyumeti,
nānyaḥ panthā vidyate ayanāya—

'By knowing Him alone one can overcome death and delusion; there is no other way to freedom and fulfilment.'

You can transcend death and delusion. You realize this truth yourself. Somebody else's realizing will not make you achieve this thing. In *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, Śankarācārya says: 'You have to eat yourself if you are hungry. If someone else eats on your behalf, it will not benefit you.' You have to realize the Truth for yourself. Therefore, in our whole life we have these beautiful ideas given to us. We have never touched even a bit of them all these one thousand years. Some superstition, some mythology; especially, we are fond of mythology, and India has produced the largest quantity of mythology in the world. Vivekananda said that we can fill the world's libraries with books of Indian mythology. Let some mythology remain; some mythology has sometimes a scientific background. Science itself becomes mythical at a higher level, especially in astronomy. Today's India must realize this truth that scientific thinking and scientific temper must develop in our people, making them to ask this question, 'What can I do with this wonderful life? I have got a packet of energy within me. How shall I handle it?' You will get guidance from the Upanishads and the Gitā. Our scriptures say that there are three types of energy in every human being. First is called *bāhubalam*, muscular energy. *Balam* is a word for strength or energy. This is very ordinary. Today we have multiplied this energy million-fold, through our rockets. 'The horse power' we also call it. These powerful rockets could send a man to the moon. One Voyager has already gone outside the solar system. That is called muscular power,

immensely multiplied through technology. The second is *buddhibalam*, intellectual energy. You go to the university, study books, science, and everything, acquire intellectual strength, *buddhibalam*. But is it all? Today's understanding is only that much—*bāhubalam* and *buddhibalam*. But our scriptures say: No, there is also *Ātmabalam*, spiritual energy. That is tremendous; there is nothing to compare with it.

How do you know about this *Ātmabalam*? That is the main subject that modern humanity must ask and find an answer. Up to that, we have come very well. Beyond the physical or sense organ level, we do not know anything. Today, science has nothing to say on this subject. But the most important energy is there waiting to be acquired—*Ātmabalam*. All kinds of temptations are coming to people everyday and man has no energy to withstand them. *Buddhibalam* has not that power. But *Ātmabalam* can do it. A little *Ātmabalam* can say *no* to all temptations. Every day our society is suffering from big and small people falling to temptations. Women are suffering, girls are suffering, boys are suffering. Everywhere you find this kind of weakening of moral resistance to antisocial temptations. Because of that we are facing increasing social problems. So, we need to develop a little of *Ātmabalam* to be able to control our minds and sense organs. These senses are very troublesome if they are not properly restrained.

Our ancient teachers gave us a beautiful idea. They said that there are six enemies of every human being—ṣaḍripu. Ṣaḍ means *ṣaṣṭha*, six; *ripu* means enemy. They are not outside, but within us. What are they? *Kāma, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, mātsarya*—unrestrained lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and

violence. These are the six enemies in every human being—this is a profound analysis of the human psyche. These are the enemies that create all the trouble. Today whatever trouble you find in the world spoiling inter-human relations is the product of these enemies—one or two or three in most cases—*kāma, krodha* and *lobha*. We have to check them. Who has to check them? Mind has to check them; mind is meant for that. But if mind is weak, it follows them, not checks them. Then we fall down before all temptations. This is what is happening to many people. For, neurology tells us today that the higher brain system is meant to control the entire sensory system. It is the special gift of evolution to humanity. But if this higher brain becomes the servant of all the sensory systems—it is unfortunately so for many people—then all moral values become eroded. Then instead of the head of the dog wagging the tail, the tail starts wagging the head of the dog. That is happening to increasing numbers of human beings today. That is why all these social problems and sufferings are multiplying every day. So, this cerebral system must become independent, must be able to control all the sensory systems. Then these enemies will not arise and trouble the individual and society. These enemies can be controlled by the human being. In the third chapter of the *Gitā*, in the last seven verses, Arjuna asks a question on this subject, and Sri Kṛṣna gives a profound answer. This is the question (3.36):

Atha kena prayukto'yam pāpam carati pūruṣaḥ;
Anicchannapi vārṣneya balādiva niyojitaḥ—

'O Kṛṣna, by what impulsion does a human being commit a crime, against one's own willingness and as if compelled by a force?' He does not want to do it; but he is compelled to do it by some force; what is that force?—that is the language. Every human being has this problem. And the answer comes from Sri Kṛṣna:

'*Kāma* and *krodha*—lust and anger are the two enemies. They overcome you and then make you do this and that; you must control them, you have that power.' Wherefrom that power comes? He is giving you the answer towards the last few ones up to the 7th verse - *Indriyāṇi parāṇyāhuḥ*. 'Sense organs are very sensitive and very helpful.' You can understand the world around you through them. Then, there is the mind above the sense organs—*Indriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ*. Then, *Manasastu parā buddhiḥ*—'beyond and higher than the *manas* is the *buddhi,* discriminatory faculty'. Is this right or wrong—that knowledge comes at the *buddhi* level. And beyond *buddhi* is the Ātman—*Yo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ*. Therefore, Evam *buddheḥ param buddhva*—'realizing the one that is beyond *buddhi',* namely, the ever pure, ever free, and ever illumined Ātman; realize that truth. Then you will be able to control other lower levels that are troubling you. No more of enemies you will have within yourself.

Evam buddheḥ param buddhva saṁstabhyātmānam ātmana;
Jahi śatrum mahābāho kāmarūpam durāsadam—

'Realizing the one higher than the *buddhi,* and controlling the lower self by the higher self or Ātman, conquer the enemy, O mighty armed, of the nature of

kāma, unrestrained lust, which is difficult to satisfy.' 'Conquer the enemy,' just like a general telling the army to capture a fort. That is the language Kṛṣṇa is using there, a warrior addressing another warrior!

So, today's householders will develop into fine citizens, working together with others, if this kind of training goes on within oneself. This is not understood in today's Western thinking, because they stop at the sensory level. Even mind is treated only as a tail of the sensory system. Take any book on the brain. It will say there is no separate mind as such, only the brain is there. But many neurologists are differing from it; they want to accept the Indian idea that the mind is higher than the brain which is only a physical instrument. But the mind is higher. And, higher than the mind is *buddhi*, the discriminative faculty, behind which is the supreme reality of the Ātman, ever pure and immortal. This truth is slowly penetrating the western thinking today. Men like Sir Charles Sherrington, the famous neurologist, says in his book, *Integrated Action of the Nervous System* (it is a famous book, every medical student has to study that book): 'One factor alone is not enough. Two factors are needed—brain and mind, not brain alone.' Some others also say so. I have quoted them in my small book *Neurology and What Lies Beyond.* That book contains my inaugural speech at the All India Neurological Conference in Hyderabad. The conference published it first, and later, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay. So, here Vedānta has the knowledge of the depth dimension of the human personality which the West has yet to develop by studying the human being in depth. They have never studied it. They know anatomy, physiology, and neurology;

beyond that, they do not know. Even psychology they are trying to understand more and more. One such psychologist has given us a beautiful idea. That was Carl Jung of Zurich, at the beginning of the century. He wrote the famous book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul.* I have got a body; very fine, but where is my soul? It has been lost in the debris of civilization. That is why he wrote the book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul.*

There is a fine passage in that book; I would like to share that with you. This life of a householder must be divided into two parts. In the first part, we engage ourselves in education, getting a job, marriage, raising a family, getting a good name and fame in society. He calls it achievement. Then, the second part of life which begins after middle age, calls for a change. Don't carry this philosophy of achievement to the second part. The second part must be devoted to personality development or culture, he says. Mere achievement should not be continued after middle age. If you go on continuing 'achievement', you will suffer from diminution of personality. Develop your inner life; that should be the purpose of the second part. You have neglected it in the midst of the struggle for achievement. Now you have time to concentrate on that.

This is exactly what Indian thought has long upheld—a householder becoming a *vānaprasthi* at a particular age. This *vānaprastha* or forest life requires today a re-consideration. When these ideas were developed in ancient India, there were plenty of forests close to any city, town, or village. But today, due to enormous population growth, forests have become very limited and exist far away from habitations. Our forest tribes

also are getting educated and going for jobs outside the forests, slowly and steadily. Under these circumstances, our *gṛhasthas* must learn the spirit of the *vānaprastha* ideal and convert the home itself into a *tapovana,* or forest retreat, as mentioned in *Hitopadeśa* (Sandhi 89):

Vanepi doṣā prabhavanti rāgiṇām
gṛheṣu sarvendriya nigrahaḥ tapaḥ
Akutsite karmaṇi yaḥ pravartate
nivṛtta rāgasya gṛham tapovanam—

'A person with worldly attachments will experience troubles even in the forest; living at home with all the senses under control is tapas or spiritual austerity. For one who is engaged in unblemished actions, and free from attachment, the very home becomes a *tapovanam.*'

In the *Manusmrti,* there is a very interesting verse. When shall I give up my worldly pursuits and concentrate on my spiritual life? This question is asked. And Manu says (6.2):

Gṛhasthastu yadā paśyet valīpalitamātmanaḥ;
Āpatyasyaiva cāpatyam tadāraṇyam samaśrayet—

'When a gṛhastha sees his own hair turning grey and the face of his offspring's offspring (grandchild), then he should resort to the forest.'

What a beautiful language! When you find your hair becoming grey, that means old age is coming on you, and seeing the grandchild's face means you have done your duty to nature. Time is running out. You have neglected a beautiful thing—your own inner

development. You were busy only with achievement, name, fame, and all that. That won't do. Reduce stress on them and concentrate on enriching your inner life. Then Jung warns: 'He or she who carries over "achievement" to the second half of life will suffer from diminution of personality.' Strength and stability, a sense of inner enrichment, come from the knowledge of the Atman. 'Even a little understanding of one's spiritual nature is the destroyer of fear,' says the *Gitā*, in the second chapter. In the pursuit of life also you may get spiritual strength to some extent. But now you can concentrate on it much more. This is what we also understood as *vānaprastha* as well as *sannyāsa*. What a novel idea—two sectors of human life! If a householder wants to live a happy life, he or she must be spiritual; that makes one expand the self to take in other selves also. Without this *ātmavikāsa*, one becomes confined to one's body or genetic system. Why is it so? Because, there will be constant conflict between husband and wife for not having the capacity to dig affections in each other. Conflict is bound to be if there is no spiritual growth in the individual. We have many religious men and women who come into conflict with each other. The mother-in-law is often very religious but unspiritual and hence oppresses her daughter-in-law. A little spiritual growth will change all this.

So Sri Ramakrishna comes with a beautiful statement: This 'I', when it is unripe—*kācā āmi*—will collide with other unripe 'I's in society. Agnostic thinker, late Bertrand Russell, said that some human beings are like billiard balls always colliding with other human beings. A billiard ball does not know how to live with or enter into other billiard balls. So, Sri Ramakrishna said that

this little 'I' must become expanded, must become *pākā āmi,* to be able to deal happily with other 'I's in society.

Today there are too many 'billiard balls' in our society, full of conflict, whether it is in politics, administration, household, or anywhere else. Even family life is suffering because of too many contracted selves. But if a little spiritual development takes place, spiritual expansion, *ātmavikāsa,* then everything will be smooth and peaceful, and life will become happy and fulfilled. Sir Julian Huxley referred to this expansion of 'I' in the language of modern biology. The unripe 'I' is called individuality, and the ripe 'I' is called personality. Individuality must grow into personality.

What is meant by the word 'person'? Huxley defines it in his Foreword to Teilhard de Chardin's book *The Phenomenon of Man*: 'Persons are individuals who transcend their organic individuality in conscious social participation.' A person has the capacity to live happily with other persons in society. Individuals cannot; they only collide. If the husband and wife are individualities, they will often indulge in conflicts. If both are personalities, absolute peace will reign in the family. This is the teaching. All these can be achieved by everyone. Apart from college education, this is the real education. You grow—the word is growth. If a child grows spiritually, you can say to him or her, that he or she will be very happy. Children are fond of the word 'growth'. You must grow, don't quarrel with other children. Make friends with them. In this way, when you tell children, their *kācā āmi* slowly becomes *pākā āmi.* This education parents must give to their children. Today they don't give it. They give them just the opposite. 'Strengthen your *kācā āmi* again and

again, try to be selfish, don't care for anybody'—that is the teaching we generally give to our children. And so this wonderful idea of spiritual growth as *kācā āmi* becoming *pākā āmi* must be kept in view to have a happy family life. *Śāntimaya, sukhamaya gṛhastha jivan* is possible if there is a little *ātmavikāsa*. That is the householder's life; he or she need not try to become a sadhu or a mystic. Spiritual life need not be mystically showy. Pure spiritual development finds expression in character development, capacity to work together in a team, and love and service. Individuals always try to pull down each other; but persons will never do so. They know how to work together. Today we are lacking in the power of team work because of this too much of individuality. So, Vedānta contains this profound philosophy of the depth dimension of the human personality centred in the Ātman. A little of its manifestation is enough to make life rich and beautiful. As Sri Kṛṣṇa said in the *Gitā* (2.40):

Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt—

'Even a little of this teaching will save one from great fear.' Says Swami Vivekananda in his lecture on 'Vedānta in its Application to Indian Life' (*Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 237):

'Strength, strength is what the Upanishads speak to me from every page. This is the one great thing to remember, it has been the one great lesson I have been taught in my life; strength, it says, strength, O man, be not weak. Are there no human weaknesses? says man. There are, say the Upanishads, but will more weakness heal them, would you try to wash dirt with

dirt? Will sin cure sin, weakness cure weakness? Strength, O man, strength, say the Upanishads. Stand up and be strong. Aye, it is the only literature in the world where you find the word *Abhih,* 'fearless', used again and again; in no other scripture in the world is this adjective applied either to God or to man.'

Spiritual energy within manifests itself as values in human life—love, compassion, spirit of service. 'What can I do for you? How can I help you?' What a change will come in our society if people develop this spiritual growth within! Till now we never had it except in some persons. Most people, however, are usually religious; they go to the temple, put on marks on the forehead, do some ritual, but remain always what they are—full of conflict with others at home or in society. To settle mutual quarrels, they go to the courts. That is why our courts are full of cases; thousands and thousands of cases are waiting in many of our courts. India has the largest number of litigations anywhere in the world, because we do not know how to settle matters by talking to each other. Human relations became very poor for the last thousand years.

All that will change in the modern period. That is the message of practical Vedanta, message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature contains profound ideas about how to develop happy human relations with other people. That is how a new India will develop. Our householders will be fine citizens of India and citizens of the world, possessed of *ātma śraddhā,* faith in oneself, and faith in others. Self-respect is very important which is lacking today. Many of our householders will be telling: 'I am a householder, what

can I do? I am a *saṁsāri,* what can I do?' That feeling must go. Sri Ramakrishna said to his householder devotees: 'You are not a *saṁsāri* . You live in *saṁsāra,* but *saṁsāra* should not be in you.' Then only can you establish happy relations with family members and society. So, let us not allow *saṁsāra* to live in us. We must have the feeling that we are citizens of democratic India, or that we are the devotees of God. Sri Ramakrishna gave this example: A boat may be on the water, but water should not be in the boat; then the boat will become stagnant and unfit for the purpose for which it is meant.

History tells us that we in India used to quarrel, individuals with individuals, groups with groups, and foreign invaders made use of this trait to establish their long rule over our country. Even today we are quarrelling with each other, in political and social life and weakening our democracy thereby. We must learn to cooperate with each other when national interest is involved. Maharashtra and Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, engage themselves in unending conflicts, as if they are two separate foreign states. That old characteristic is still lingering. So, this kind of human development will take place in India when Vivekananda literature inspires a good section of our people. It is human development in a fundamental way, not merely getting a degree and getting a good salary; that is not enough. Have I become truly developed as a human being? Have I become a source of strength to our democratic state? That is the question we have to ask and get a positive answer. That is why if our householders—and as I said earlier, 99.9 percent of people are householders only—follow the teachings of

Swami Vivekananda and the *Gitā's* practical Vedānta, they will become healthy and strong, and endowed with the humanistic attitude, that will make the whole country strong and gentle.

In this connection, it will be instructive to acqaint oneself with the famous story of Dharmavyādha in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, narrated by sage Mārkaṇḍeya to Yudhiṣṭhira, during the Pāṇḍavās *vanavāsa*. The story is of a brāhmaṇa ascetic, Kauśika, receving spiritual lessons, first from a housewife and then from a meat-seller. The story emphasises the spiritual value of serving one's aged parents and the greatness of householders (*Araṇya Parva*, 197, 1–21):

A brāhmaṇa ascetic by name Kauśika was doing austerities under a tree. A bird, balākā, sitting on the tree, passed stool which fell on the ascetic. He looked up and saw the bird on the tree; his angry look made the bird fall down dead in front of him. The ascetic was grieved at the scene and said to himself that anger made him do an evil act.

Soon after, he went to the village nearby and approached a home of a householder for alms. The wife of the householder received him and requested him to wait a little; just at the time her husband came back home. Requesting the ascetic to wait a little, which he did not like, she took time to serve her husband with love and devotion.

The ascetic was angry that he is being neglected by her in order to serve her husband. He told her that an angry brāhmaṇa can burn up things. She replied: 'I am not insulting you; please excuse my neglect of you; among all the gods, I consider the service and care of my husband as most important. Brāhmaṇa, I know that

you have burnt, a little ago, the balāka bird by your uncontrolled anger. Anger is the enemy of human beings. One who renounces anger and delusion is a true brāhmaṇa, so say the gods. In the country of Mithilā (now Bihar), there is a dharmavyādha, meat seller; he will teach you about dharma or ethics and morals; please go to him. Please excuse me if I have been impertinent in advising you.'

The ascetic understood her greatness and reached Mithilā passing through many forests, towns, and cities, and went to the shop of the dharmavyādha. He received the ascetic and said to him: 'You are welcome. I know your burning of the balāka bird and the advice given to you by that chaste housewife and why you have come to me here. This place (meat shop) is not a fit place to converse; we shall both go to my home'.

There also the ascetic had to wait till the Vyādha or hunter had served his aged parents. Then comes a long discourse on dharma by the hunter-meat-seller, to the brāhmaṇa ascetic, of which the last 17 to 21 verses I give below:

Indriyāṇyeva tat sarvam yat svarganarakāvubhau;
Nigṛhīta visṛṣṭāni svargāya narkāya ca—

'What are called heaven and hell, both are nothing but the sense organs; when they are controlled and disciplined, it is heaven; when they are let loose, it is hell.'

Eṣa yoga vidhiḥ kṛtsno yāvadindriya dhāraṇam;
Etat mūlam hi tapasaḥ kṛtsnasya narakasya ca—

'The discipline of the senses is the sum total of

the means of (man's) attaining all spiritual advancement; its presence or absence is at the root of man's every experience of spiritual enrichment (which is heaven) and all hell (which is spiritual impoverishment).'

Indriyāṇām prasaṅgena doṣamṛcchatyasaṁśayam;
Sanniyamyatu tānyeva tataḥ siddhim samāpnuyāt—

'By indulging in them (men and women) undoubtedly contracts all vices; when, on the other hand, they are controlled and regulated, (men and women) attain spiritual freedom and fulfilment.'

Ṣaṇṇām ātmani nityānām aiśvaryam yo'dhigacchati;
Na sa pāpaiḥ kuto'narthaiḥ yujyate vijitendriyaḥ—

'The self-controlled person who has acquired mastery over the six senses (five sense organs and the sense-bound mind) within himself, or herself, is tainted neither by sin nor by other evils.'

Rathaḥ śarīram puruṣasya dṛṣṭam
ātmā niyantā indriyāṇyāhuḥ aśvān;
Tairapramattaḥ kuśalī sadaśvaiḥ
dāntaiḥ sukham yāti rathi iva dhīraḥ—

'The visible human physical body is said to be like a chariot, his or her soul, the controlling charioteer, and his or her senses, the horses; the wise and efficeint person, with reason, calm and unperturbed, rides in happiness (and peace) like a capable and uninebriated driver controlling his or her disciplined horses.'

I went to Bihar to give a Hindi lecture at Chapra,

four or five years ago, on *Gṛhastha Dharma* (that has been published as a booklet in many languages). There I saw a weak society, full of crime, full of poverty, feudal in attitude; because too many Buddhist monks were there, thousands of them, who, in a period of decay, became lazy, and householders imitated them. A firm development of household life, with divine virtues and graces, is needed today in a big way, not only in Bihar, but all over India. The gṛhastha is highly praised by our *Manusmṛti.* I want to convey to you that verse conveying a sense of self-respect, steadiness, and energy, which our *gṛhasthas* have lost for the last many centuries (3.78):

Yasmāt trayopyāśramiṇo jñānenānnena cānvaham;
Gṛhasthenaiva dhāryante tasmāt jyeṣṭhāsramī gṛhī—

The greatness of the *gṛhastha* is mentioned in these words: *tasmāt jyeṣṭhāsramī gṛhī*—'Therefore the *gṛhastha ashrama* is the pre-eminent ashrama.' Because *trayopyāśramiṇo jñānenānnena cānvaham gṛhasthenaiva dhāryante*—'because the other three ashramas *(brahmacarya, vānaprastha and sannyāsa)* are nourished constantly with education and food by the *gṛhastha* only.' A *brahmacāri* does not earn; a *vānaprasthi* does not earn; so also a *sannyāsi.* Only a householder works and earns. By that one group, all the other three groups are educated and fed; that is its greatness. What a beautiful and true conception! Our *gṛhasthas* had forgotten it. They have to recapture it once again. That will be a new chapter of householder's life. They can work together and achieve great things together. Our parliament, assemblies, municipalities, and *pancayats*

will be revolutionized. That kind of togetherness must be achieved. As it is, our *gṛhasthas* will more often trouble their neighbour. If I sweep my house, I put the dirt in front of my neighbour's house; I don't put it in front of my house. Everywhere in India this is a common practice. All good things for me and bad for others! Forsaking this petty attitude, our people must learn to work together.

There is more than one chapter on 'Advice to Householders' in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. A householder asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Can we realize God?' 'Why not?', Sri Ramakrishna said, 'God is your own self, the Self of your self. You can realize Him. Only necessary changes you must adopt in your life. Then it will be possible.' In this way, 'spiritual growth' will become the key words of human development hereafter. Along with physical and intellectual growth, there must be stress on spiritual growth. 'Have I grown spiritually?' every one must ask this question. Go to a temple and worship; return and ask yourself, 'Have I grown spiritually?' Going to temple and all other religious practices have got their purposes fulfilled only if this is done. You eat food; and if you don't grow physically, what is the use of eating? Similarly, in spiritual life, there is such a thing as adhyātmika vikāsa—spiritual growth. Keep that principle in view. Then *gṛhasthashrama* will be a beautiful experience. The salvation of India will come through such a *gṛhasthasramas*.

I convey to you all the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna for this achievement of being true gṛhasthas. It is the sense in which Vedanta and the *Gitā* and Sri Ramakrishna express it.

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